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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6905

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SUBJECT: BRAJESH MISHRA SAYS BJP LOOKING TO MODIFY NUCLEAR
INITIATIVE OPPOSITION

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

¶1. (C) Former National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra told the Ambassador on September 12 that Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders recognize that their continuing opposition to the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Initiative is not likely to pay off in the next elections. BJP chiefs are considering at the party's September 12-14 Executive Board meeting how to get out from under the party's burdensome position. Mishra explained that BJP leaders recognize the need to realign the party's stance with its key middle class constituency, which largely supports the Initiative.

¶2. (C) BJP leader L.K. Advani remains "obsessed" with becoming Prime Minister, according to Mishra, which has clouded his judgment on the issue. According to Mishra, Advani's opposition to the Initiative has stemmed in part from his belief, held until recently, that as Prime Minister he would be obliged to follow in the footsteps of the previous BJP-led government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who authorized the "Pokhran II" test immediately after assuming office in 1998. Advani is gradually recognizing, according to Mishra, that further nuclear testing is not viable, and that renegotiating the 123 Agreement would not result in a better deal for India.

¶3. (C) The BJP leadership lacks a clear, unified position on how to proceed. Mishra said that senior BJP leaders Arun Shourie and Yashwant Sinha need to "recognize that this game is over, make adjustments, and get on with it." Jaswant Singh "is ready," but Party chief Rajnath Singh remains undecided. In his remarks to Executive Board on September 12, Rajnath Singh continued to criticize Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government for "misleading the country, all the political parties, and the Indian parliament." (Rajnath Singh hopes to succeed Advani as the party's candidate for Prime Minister, but Advani reportedly prefers controversial Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi.)

¶4. (C) Mishra does not believe that controversial issues such as testing, fuel supply assurances, or enrichment and reprocessing technology that continue to linger in local media constitute serious political problems for the UPA government. The important thing now, according to Mishra, is to allow the U.S. Congress to take action to complete the Initiative. Mishra believes, however, that domestic political pressures will not allow the Indian Government to wait indefinitely for the U.S. to finalize the Initiative prior to initiating civil nuclear cooperation with France and Russia. Because India will face elections in early 2009, he said, "A timetable that stretches beyond December will not

work for India."

15. (C) COMMENT. If Mishra's claim is correct that the Nuclear Initiative has caused Advani to reconsider the costs versus benefits of further nuclear testing by any government led by his party, it is compelling evidence that bringing India into the global civil nuclear club fundamentally changes the political calculus in Delhi. This altered political environment could lead to significant nonproliferation benefits apart from and in addition to India's tangible nonproliferation commitments enumerated in the Hyde Act currently under consideration by the U.S. Congress. END COMMENT.

MULFORD